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## “Writers and the International Spirit”: Irish PEN in the Postwar Years

The vision of the writer as the liberal conscience of the world was the cornerstone on which the group now known as PEN International—easily the most prominent human rights literary organization in the world—was founded.<sup>1</sup> When the International PEN Congress was held in Dublin in June 1953, the crusade by its members to uphold the cultural freedom and integrity of writers stood as one of the crucial objectives of the organization. On that occasion, literary, political, and cultural organizations came together to welcome some 439 delegates from thirty-seven PEN centers and twenty-seven countries in Europe, the United States, New Zealand, India, Indonesia, and Japan, and organizers enlisted the support of the president of Ireland in promoting the event. In many ways, the staging of this major literary event signaled a coming of age of the only recently declared Republic of Ireland in world literature. For a period of five days, Irish PEN and Irish writers were at the center of the literary world. Coming at a critical time in the formation of the state, it represents one of a series of nation-building events to promote a vision of Ireland as a modern nation, and also to foster tourism.<sup>2</sup> The 1953 PEN Congress highlights the interaction between the

1. This title is taken from an American article by Marchette Chute, “PEN for Peace: Writers and the International Spirit,” *Saturday Review*, 3 March 1956, 9–10. A copy of this is held in the depositories of the National Library of Ireland (NLI). Miscellaneous, 1945–1999, Irish P.E.N. Papers, 1935–2000, National Library of Ireland, Dublin. For the purposes of this paper, the acronym P.E.N. will be denoted as PEN, and to distinguish International PEN from Irish PEN, the latter will be denoted as PEN or Irish PEN only.

2. The hosting of the PEN Congress in 1953 represents part of this overall effort to promote a modern state, as well as promote literature. Brian F. Kennedy lists the Congress as one of two important international events held in Ireland in 1953, along with the International Congress of Art Critics, held in July 1953. See Brian P. Kennedy, *Dreams and Responsibilities: The State and the Arts in Independent Ireland*, (Dublin: Criterion Press, 1998), 107. In political terms, the postwar Irish government made great strides to promote Ireland on a worldwide stage and to develop foreign relations, especially in its efforts to joining the United Nations. Despite the failure of the initial submission to the UN, Ireland finally gained membership in 1955. Dermot Keogh asserts that this period was far from stagnant in terms of foreign policy. Ireland joined a number of international organizations—including the World Health Organization and the Educational, Scientific and

literary community and the international fight for freedom of expression during the mid-twentieth-century. It also demonstrates that the Dublin PEN center was aware of, and active in, contemporary efforts to move Ireland into the larger world. PEN's connections with writers worldwide also challenge the commonly received notions of a post-Emergency Ireland culturally isolated intelligentsia and a stagnant literary field.

PEN—the acronym stands for poets, essayists, and novelists, though its catchment was later extended to include editors, translators and others—was founded in London in 1921.<sup>3</sup> Envisioned by its founder Amy Dawson Scott as a vehicle for peace and cooperation, PEN's aim is to promote friendship, freedom of expression, international goodwill and intellectual cooperation among writers. A Dublin branch of PEN was informally set up in Dublin by Lady Gregory in 1921.<sup>4</sup> The Dublin group became a formalized club in 1934, and attracted a broad membership from Dublin's literary circles, including Sean O'Faolain, Dorothy Macardle, Seamus McCall, Dorothy Day, Bulmer Hobson, Lady Christine Longford, Desmond McCarthy, Blanaid Salkeld, Maurice Walshe, Francis Hackett, Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, Sheila Pim, Lilian Davidson, Rutherford Mayne, Annie P. Smithson, Cecil Salkeld, Kate O'Brien, Seumus O'Sullivan, Maura Lavery, and Temple Lane.<sup>5</sup> The Irish club forged extensive networks extending to South America, the United States, France, Netherlands, Sweden, New Zealand, Poland, and England (where the office of the International PEN was located). The club's first public event was a dinner in recognition of W. B. Yeats's seventieth birthday. Speakers included Francis Hackett, Desmond McCarthy, and Sean O'Faolain. All posited the club as an internationally minded organization, and announced their manifesto: "We have founded PEN," O'Faolain said on the oc-

Cultural Organization (UNESCO); the latter was affiliated with PEN after 1949. Dermot Keogh, *Twentieth-Century Ireland: Nation and State* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1994), 161. Culturally, too, the activities undertaken in the 1950s created the conditions for the modernization of Ireland in the 1960s. Brian Fallon reminds us of the various events and festivals that began in the early 1950s up to the end of the decade. Fallon makes the point that important cultural events reflect the rich creativity of the period, and the efforts by the artistic community to effect change. Such events as the Wexford Opera Festival (1951) and the Cork Film Festival (1956) were set up during this period, and as America was opening up to Irish influences, actors, writers, architects, and fashion designers successfully entered this market. See Brian Fallon, *An Age of Innocence: Irish Culture 1930–1960* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1998).

3. The organization provides a brief history at "Our History PEN International." 2017. *Pen-International. Org.* <http://www.pen-international.org/our-history/>.

4. Lady Gregory held informal PEN meetings in Roberts Café in Grafton Street, Dublin. "The Famous Cafes—Robert Roberts." 2017. <http://robertroberts.ie/the-famous-cafes/>.

5. This list is garnered from committee records held in the National Library of Ireland. Centre Minute Books, Irish P.E.N. Papers, 1935–2004, National Library of Ireland (hereafter cited as Minutes PEN Papers).

casion, “to feel the rivalry, the emulation, the excitement of ideas, of criticism, of everything that belongs to the world of imagination and ideas . . . we recognize and fight for the intellectual fraternity of mankind.” Well aware of the publicity surrounding the event, O’Faolain left the public in no doubt as to nature of the group’s intention to oppose censorship when he urged Irish writers to “fight to the last ditch” for the liberty of the press. Pointing to the problems of the suppression of writers worldwide, and invoking the concerns of H. G. Wells (a founding member of PEN) and what Wells called the “monster of organisation” in Europe, O’Faolain warned his audience of the danger that “they may in time come our own way.”<sup>6</sup> O’Faolain’s words would prove prophetic. As war clouds loomed over Europe, censorship became more pervasive, and tensions between PEN centers heightened.

Irish attendance at PEN’s international congresses was problematic from the start. In Buenos Aires in 1936, the first congress to be attended by an Irish delegate, a quarrel broke out between the French delegate M. Jules Romains and the Italian delegate F.T. Marinetti over the right to freedom of speech.<sup>7</sup> The angry interchanges underlined a growing chasm between the declared apolitical ethos of the club and the activist inclinations of individuals within it. The Irish delegate, the novelist and journalist Seamus McCall, was accused by Irish and English newspapers of having been embroiled in a “stormy debate on Fascism,” an accusation he furiously dismissed. At a PEN meeting in Jury’s Hotel in October 1936, the indignant McCall claimed the reports were fabricated: “there was not one [debate], stormy or otherwise. There was not even a vote taken.”<sup>8</sup> The deteriorating relations caused by the turbulent international situation would taint peaceful cooperation between PEN centers for many decades, but for the journalist McCall, it was the reaction of the public to the Congress and their regard for the press that intrigued him:

Once inside, the hall was like a monstrous tin of sardines. Old men and young men, elegantly dressed ladies’ and mere ‘flappers’ stood in congested masses in every available open space, crowded every staircase and gangway, overflowed on

6. “Homage to Dr. Yeats: PEN’s Club Dinner, Tribute by John Masefield, The Praise of his Heart’s Desire,” *Irish Times*, 28 June, 1935, 8. This speech by Sean O’Faolain was given at a dinner held in the Dolphin Hotel, with tributes from John Masefield. It was arranged to coincide with Francis Hackett’s festschrift on Yeats, known as, “The Irish P.E.N. Book on Yeats.” Despite the contributions from such writers as John Eglinton, L. A. G. Strong, and Sean O’Faolain, the Yeats festschrift was never published. The collection of letters, typescripts and news cutting of this collection is held in the UCD Library Special Collections.

7. For a comprehensive account of this interchange, see Rachel Potter, “Modernist Rights: International PEN 1921–1936,” *Critical Quarterly* 55, 2 (July, 2013), 66–80.

8. “P.E.N. Congress at Buenos Aires, Description by Mr. Seamus McCall, The Value of Press Publicity,” *Irish Times*, 30 October 1936, 5.

to 'the floor of the house', and piled themselves into squashed heaps of humanity at every doorway.<sup>9</sup>

The packed scene that McCall witness was a result of steadfast press publicity. In Buenos Aires, McCall surmised, the Argentinian "newspapers had shown to their readers" that a writer was "at least as important as a prize-fighter," and citizens looked on the power of the pen as a legitimate force for social and political action.<sup>10</sup> In Ireland, certainly, the writers' sense of being repressed was further exacerbated by the omnipresent Irish Censorship Board, which banned hundreds of works of many Irish writers, often for a single passage in a novel. This approach was unacceptable to those who perceived it as a direct threat to their profession and to their right to freedom of creative expression, with the result that some writers left the country or stopped writing altogether.<sup>11</sup>

PEN's crusade for freedom of expression was based on a belief in the force of literature, unimpeded by geographical boundaries or government interference. Under the direction of Herman Ould, the secretary of International PEN and frequent visitor to Irish PEN meetings, the group saw itself as establishing a "world republic of letters" that would remain outside of politics.<sup>12</sup> Strategically, the Irish writers joined with International PEN to condemn abuses, at a time when the notion of human rights worldwide was in still in its infancy.<sup>13</sup> One of

9. "PEN Congress at Buenos Aires."

10. "PEN Congress at Buenos Aires."

11. For example, according to Benedict Kiely, the writer and PEN member Francis Hackett and his wife Sigvig Toksvig left Ireland indignant after their books *The Green Lion* (1936) and *Eve's Doctor* (1937) respectively, were banned. Banned writer Maura Laverty gave up writing novels completely after her third novel *No More than Human* (1944) was banned. Her two previous novels *Never No More: The Story of a Lost Village* (1942), and *Alone We Embark* (1943) were also banned. She went on to become a well-known food writer and penned the first soap opera *Tolka Row* in the 1960s for RTÉ. The most controversial censorship case was unquestionably the banning of Kate O'Brien's novel *The Land of Spices* (1941) for a passage suggesting homosexuality. It was referred to as the "Sodomy Book" during the Senate debates about censorship in 1942, resulting in an outcry from literary circles, particularly from Sean O'Faolain, editor of *The Bell*. According to her lifelong friend Lorna Reynolds, the effect of having her books banned (another novel, *Mary Lavelle*, was banned in 1935) and the impact on her family influenced her writing style thereafter. See: Eibhear Walshe, *Kate O'Brien: A Writing Life* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2006); Lorna Reynolds, *Kate O'Brien: A Literary Portrait* (Buckinghamshire: Colin Smythe, 1987), and Caleb Richardson, "'They are not worthy of themselves': The Tailor and Ansty Debates of 1942," *Éire-Ireland* 42, 3–4 (Autumn–Winter, 2007), 148–72. For surveys of censorship in Ireland during this period, see: Julia Carlson, *Banned in Ireland: Censorship and the Irish Writer* (London: Routledge, 1990), and Donal Ó Drisceoil, "A Dark Chapter: Censorship and the Irish Writer," in *The Oxford History of the Irish Book, vol. V: The Irish Book in English 1891–2000*, ed. Clare Hutton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

12. See R. A. Wilford "The P.E.N. Club, 1930–50," *Journal of Contemporary History* 14, 1 (1979), 99–116.

13. Mark Mazower argues that the notion of human rights, as we now know it, was still in its infancy during the interwar years. His illuminating history sheds light on human rights development lead-

these campaigns included the denunciation of the treatment of German Jews in 1938. In a resolution signed by the president, Maurice Walsh, PEN issued a formidable statement on behalf of the club: "The Irish PEN (Dublin) protests against the persecution of helpless people in Totalitarian States and pledges itself to do everything possible to assist them."<sup>14</sup> The decision to speak out raises questions about the role of the writer in international affairs, but also underlines the commitment of PEN to humanitarian issues.<sup>15</sup> By collectively uniting with other PEN centers (there were more than forty-four by the end of the 1930s), the Irish group was positioning the club within an international rights platform, and declaring their allegiance to an international network of writers.<sup>16</sup> In 1939, the World Congress of Writers held in New York issued a resolution urging writers to actively defend peace and to support civilization—broad goals indeed, but the resolution was widely viewed as a statement of support for the Allies, although intellectuals were left to themselves to decide which side they were on.

In Ireland, such debates were complicated by the official policy of neutrality, which enjoyed wide popular support. Notwithstanding, the Irish writers went out on a limb and invited delegates from Polish PEN as their guests.<sup>17</sup> Originally the date for the visit from the Polish contingent was set for early May 1942, and the Polish consul was invited. Bertie Smyllie, the editor of the *Irish Times*, was also invited, owing in part to his experience as a foreign correspondent and his

ing up to and after the World War II. See Mark Mazower, "The Strange Triumph of Human Rights, 1933–1950," *Historical Journal* 47, 2 (2004), 379–98.

14. This statement was reported by the *Irish Times* following the PEN annual general meeting in Jury's Hotel in November 1938, following a discussion of the committee. It was issued in response to a letter from International PEN. See Minutes, PEN Papers, November 26, 1938.

15. Interestingly, although International PEN were involved in an appeal for Catalan writers forced into exile, and support for the plight of suppressed Catalan writers was expressed during the Dublin Congress, there is no recorded discussion of the Spanish Civil War in the Irish PEN minutes. However, some PEN members such as Blanaid and Cecil French Salkeld appear to have had sympathies with the republican struggle in the Spanish Civil War. As owners of the private concern the Gayfield Press, they were the first to publish a collection of poetry by Ewart Milne, who fought in the Spanish Civil War on the republican side. Milne pays tribute to his friend, the poet Charles Donnelly, who was killed in the war, in his collection of poetry, *Letter from Ireland* (1940), which was published by Gayfield Press. See Deirdre Brady, "Modernist Presses and the Gayfield Press," *Bibliologia* 9 (2014), 113–28.

16. "P.E.N. Congress at Buenos Aires," 5.

17. It is likely this is in response to a request from Herman Ould to help Polish exiles in London. Jennifer Birkett reminds us that Herman Ould and Margaret Storm Jacobson actively helped intellectuals fleeing from Nazi Germany; supporting writers financially, appealing to PEN centers for visas and finding accommodation. Jennifer Birkett, "Margaret Storm Jameson and the London PEN Centre: Mobilising Commitment," *E-Rea*, 4, 2 (2006), <http://erea.revues.org/256>. For a comprehensive history of London PEN in the mid-twentieth-century, see R. A. Wilford, "The P.E.N. Club, 1930–50," *Journal of Contemporary History* 14, 1 (January, 1979), 98–116.

fluency in German.<sup>18</sup> Notably, PEN commandeered four bottles of wine and one of sherry, with the chairman to have “discretionary power to order further refreshment if expedient” for the occasion—an impressive order during a period of severe shortages and rationing.<sup>19</sup> The meeting fell through, with no explanation given. Another attempt was made to visit Dublin in September 1942, but this too fell through, though the PEN committee agreed to send a letter of goodwill to London PEN.<sup>20</sup> We can only speculate as to why the meetings never happened, but travel restrictions, or a desire to avoid political controversy, or surveillance by government forces may have been factors.

Earlier in 1941, a lively debate sprung up in PEN when a letter arrived from Herman Ould inviting Irish PEN to send delegates to the London Congress. Members were divided on whether or not to attend, and the issue was discussed at the executive level and recorded in the minutes: “it was not clear that writers in certain countries might not be precluded from attending owing to Great Britain being a belligerent in the present war.”<sup>21</sup> In Ireland, attending the London Congress would be seen in most quarters as a statement of support for the Allies; the meeting was, in fact, supported by the ministry of information and the British Council.<sup>22</sup> Under the chairmanship of the poet Austin Clarke, the Irish writers reached a diplomatic solution. An Irish delegation would attend with a representative from Dublin PEN and Belfast PEN. Denis Ireland and May Morton (Belfast PEN), and Peadar O’Donnell (Dublin PEN) were nominated as representatives of PEN for the whole of Ireland.<sup>23</sup> They would attend as a “single delegation,” quietly aligning with the Allies, without breaching the neutrality policy.<sup>24</sup> International PEN put forth an ambitious and visionary program for the London Congress, with an optimistic theme of “The Future of the PEN.” Topics including nationalism and internationalism as they affect the writer;

18. Minutes PEN Papers, 5 March 1942.

19. Minutes PEN Papers, 24 April 1942.

20. Minutes PEN Papers, 25 September 1942.

21. Minutes PEN Papers, 21 July 1941.

22. Jennifer Birkett, “Margaret Storm Jameson and the London PEN Centre: Mobilising Commitment,” *E-Rea* 4, 2 (2006), <http://erea.revues.org/256>.

23. Up to 1953, Belfast PEN and Dublin PEN operated under one umbrella, led by the Dublin center, after which they formed two separate entities. Throughout the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, their relationship remained close and cordial and they continued to meet regularly. References to the separation are recorded in the minutes. Minutes PEN Papers, 7 October 1953.

24. Although there is no clear mention of the stance taken by the PEN club on the issue of neutrality, it is clear from the discussions about the Congress in London in 1941 that the matter was discussed. It is difficult to trace any obvious responses from individual writers from the committee reports, but it is widely accepted that most Irish people were on the side of the Allied forces. For a discussion of writers during the war, see Clair Wills, “The Aesthetics of Irish Neutrality During the Second World War,” *Boundary* 2, 31, 1 (Spring, 2004), 119–45.

refugee authorship; and the position of the writer after the war.<sup>25</sup> For the Irish contingent, the Congress passed without any controversy. However, in January 1942, *PEN News* reported on a speech given at a memorial for the writer and former PEN president Henry Nevinston in which the speaker deliberately attacked Irish neutrality.<sup>26</sup> This article was perceived by the members of the committee as politically provocative, forcing the issue back onto PEN's agenda.

An internal PEN report afterward described the article as controversial and against the spirit of PEN.<sup>27</sup> Kenneth Reddin, the president of the club, argued that it was "propaganda, attacking the neutrality of Eire, and that all we wanted was to be left alone."<sup>28</sup> His response is unsurprising. The idea that Ireland wanted to be "left alone" mirrored the view expressed by government policy, and was shared by the majority of the population who justified neutrality. Within PEN, neutrality was not a battle in which they wanted to be embroiled, as individual writers differed in their views. Such a distinctly Irish concern also contravened the ideal of PEN as a world association of writers as put forward by E. M. Forster, during the opening speech of the Congress. A subcommittee was formed, and Lord Longford issued a letter to the general secretary of International PEN, objecting to the *PEN News* article, only to receive a swift and scathing response inquiring if PEN "would have preferred the report of the speech to be suppressed."<sup>29</sup> In time, Irish PEN turned its focus away from this issue and toward matters of professional justice. Such concerns as higher payment rates for writers, the embargo on Irish books between Britain and Ireland, and the necessity of setting up a civil list to aid elderly artists in poor circumstances exercised many within the club.

The Dublin PEN tirelessly promoted Irish writing and Irish books.<sup>30</sup> PEN arranged garden parties, annual dinners, and "at homes" despite the rationing of food and gasoline during the Emergency. These convivial gatherings served as important social spaces in which the writers, as public figures, could establish important links with other literary agents, critics, and publishers. But they also underscore the determination of the intelligentsia to keep art and literature

25. "P.E.N. Congress," *Irish Times*, 8 September 1941, 4.

26. I have not been able to locate a copy of this article, although it is clear from committee reports that the contentious issue concerns Irish neutrality. See Minutes PEN Papers, February 20, 1942.

27. Minutes PEN Papers, February 20, 1942.

28. Minutes PEN Papers, February 20, 1942.

29. Minutes PEN Papers, March 27, 1942.

30. One example includes a public meeting in 1941. This was first mooted at a committee meeting on February 18, 1941. PEN decided to organize a special meeting of "authors, books and booksellers" to discuss the position of Irish books. This was held in Jury's Hotel in March. Speakers on the night included the writer Denis Ireland, Blanaid Salkeld (the Gayfield Press), Terence Trench (the Three Candle Press), and Róisín Walsh (chief librarian of County Dublin, and the only woman on the first editorial board of the journal *The Bell*). See: Minutes PEN Papers, February 18, 1941; "Position of Irish Books: Debate at P.E.N. Club: Conversazione," *Irish Times*, 1 April 1941, 8.



flourishing during difficult circumstances. Whenever possible, visiting authors to Dublin were invited to “at homes,” usually held in exclusive hotels or at garden parties of certain members. Such luminaries as the poet Cecil Day Lewis, the editor and journalist Kinsley Martin, and the American press attaché Richard Watts were among those invited to speak at events.<sup>31</sup> Guest speakers delivered talks on such topics as “Poetry in the theatre”; “Critics the parasites”; “Can the writer be neutral?”; “Irish literary magazines”; and “Critics and the artist.”<sup>32</sup> After the war, topics under discussion shifted to a more outward focus, to include “Icelandic and Irish folklore”; “Trends in contemporary Spanish literature”; and to new technologies, which opened up opportunities for writers such as “writing for the radio,” “Literature in broadcasting,” and “Writing for the Films.”<sup>33</sup> Despite the arduous efforts of the literary establishment to continue as normal, beneath the surface the fierce antagonism between writers and the government continued over the matter of censorship. With the market cut off by the war, the business of writing for a worldwide market for Irish books was even more problematic. The implications of censorship were even more serious. Any dissent by intellectuals had implications for the suppression of books, as Rosamund Jacob, a writer, activist and PEN member, reveals in her diary:

Went to 24 Beechwood Av [*sic*] in the evening to the sub-committee, very interesting. Le Brocquy made impassioned plea not to form official organisation, sure to be spied on & crushed in all sorts of ways, & so many thngs [*sic*] police have to spy on, they wd hate us anyway for giving them another. Suppression of free-thinking books wd follow etc. Very true, & they all saw it.<sup>34</sup>

31. Richard Watts was invited in September 1941 to speak at a PEN meeting in November, possibly as a public relations gesture following the bad publicity generated by the Congress in London. Cecil Day Lewis was invited to speak to PEN in 1944, though it is unclear if he attended. The invitation to Kingsley Martin, editor of *The Statesman*, proved the most contentious. Kingley’s invitation, issued in February 1943, was followed by an acceptance to speak, with a proviso. Initially he insisted on being paid for his appearance, and sent a letter leaving the committee “in no doubt as to their responsibility in the expenses of the visit.” They decided to cancel the invitation, and ask Lennox Robinson instead. However, by June 1943, Martin had a change of heart and sent a letter indicating he was now free to attend PEN. No monies were mentioned, and Martin was re-invited. See Minutes PEN Papers, September 25, 1941; Minutes PEN Papers, January 21, 1944; Minutes PEN Papers, February 17, March 11, and June 13, 1943 respectively.

32. Respectively: Minutes PEN papers, November 3, 1937; Minutes PEN Papers, December 7, 1939; Minutes PEN Papers, September 15, 1939; Minutes PEN Papers, October 4, 1940; Minutes PEN Papers, March 16, 1945.

33. Respectively: Minutes PEN Papers, February 1, 1946; Minutes PEN Papers, February 7, 1947; Minutes PEN Papers, January 23, 1948; Minutes PEN Papers, December 4, 1948; Minutes PEN Papers, January 28, 1949.

34. Jacob refers here to Sybil le Brocquy and to a meeting with the WCA (Women’s Citizen Association), recorded in her diary on Tuesday January 13, 1942. Three days later, Jacob was part of a committee from the Irish Society for Intellectual Freedom who approached Irish PEN about form-



Jacob's diary highlights the intrusion of the state in the lives of the writers, during the World War II. All forms of communication including private correspondence could be scrutinized, and the government closely watch organizations and individuals.<sup>35</sup> But it also sheds light on the dilemma faced by intellectuals, who on the one hand were broadly in support of neutrality, and on the other hand, passionately protesting for their right to freedom of expression. In an ingenious stroke of politicking, PEN set up a "Council of Action" with other interested parties in the book trade.<sup>36</sup> As a united lobby group, the council paved the way for a forceful protest against the amendment of the Censorship Act of 1929, but avoided any mention of the Emergency Powers Act of 1939. Indeed, during a public meeting of PEN in 1942, speakers condemned the Censorship Board for its lack of fairness, common sense, and conscientiousness—but formally, objected only to the "cases of injustice and misinterpretation of the Act," thereby avoiding any direct criticism of the policy.<sup>37</sup>

Committee minutes offer a new perspective about the events leading up to the formation of the "Council of Action" that underlines the significant influences of literary women to the cultural history of the period. Publicly, PEN received credit for instigating the council, but its founding was actually prompted by the persistent efforts of the Irish Society for Intellectual Freedom (ISIF). In January 1942, the ISIF sent a letter to the PEN committee inviting them to send "delegates to a proposed meeting of representatives of literary and other societies to formulate an authoritative demand for the removal of the censorship of books."<sup>38</sup> This began a series of exchanges that would in time lead to legislative reform. This initial communication was followed up in April 1942, this time in the form of a delegate visit from the ISIF led by the imposing figure of Hanna Sheehy Skeffington. PEN soon agreed to devote a special meeting to a "symposium on the Censorship of Books (not including the censorship of publications

ing the Council of Action. Women activists of the period, such as Jacob and le Brocquy, were often involved in many different clubs and associations of the period. Furthermore, Dermot Keogh states that artistic groups often came under the watchful eye of the authorities, but there was no reason to suspect any underlying motivations beyond artistic concerns. Keogh, 142. See also Papers of Rosamond Jacob, 1878–1960, Collection list 30, MS 32,582. National Library of Ireland, Dublin.

35. Clair Wills also discusses the complex responses of writers during the war. Wills, "The Aesthetics of Irish Neutrality."

36. These are listed in the minutes as the Irish Academy of Letters, National University of Ireland, the Booksellers Association, National Union of Journalists, Dublin Literary Society, Irish Association for Intellectual Freedom, Women Writers Club, Librarians Association, Institute of Journalists, W.A.A.M.A [the Writers Guild], Books Fair Committee, Royal Irish Academy, and the Women's Social and Political Union. Minutes PEN Papers, June 11, 1942.

37. "Book Censorship," *Irish Times*, 1 June 1942, 2.

38. Minutes PEN Papers, January 16, 1942.

under the Emergency Powers Act, 1939).”<sup>39</sup> It is unclear if such a symposium actually took place, but shortly after, PEN received a letter from Rosamund Jacob, the secretary of the ISIF, outlining arrangements for a special meeting on censorship in May.<sup>40</sup> PEN immediately sent invitations to various civil rights and writers groups to attend a public debate in Jury’s Hotel in May. This debate, and the formation of the council, led to organized public pressure to amend the Act. Within four years, the legislation was changed, with new terms that allowed authors or publishers appeal a decision. The relaxation of censorship was in some ways more symbolic than substantive. However, as many of the books “unbanned” after the Repeat Act of 1946 were either out of print or unavailable.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, the campaign highlights the difficulties faced by PEN during this period and represents a victory of sorts in the battle for freedom of expression. The victory is even more pronounced when it is contextualized within the club’s need to balance the diversity of views of its membership, the complex issue of neutrality, and the changing nature of its relationship with official Ireland.

The shift in relations was a significant factor in facilitating the 1953 Congress. As the country began to back away from its political and cultural climate of isolation, the newly formed Advisory Cultural Relations Committee (established in 1946) began to take an interest in intellectuals in Irish society. Given its responsibility for promoting Irish culture abroad, the committee took a keen interest in PEN, with its established network of contacts internationally.<sup>42</sup> In a letter to PEN from the minister of external affairs in 1949, PEN was actively encouraged to send a delegation to London to discuss the possibility of holding a PEN congress in Ireland.<sup>43</sup> The discussions got off to a shaky start, after the Cultural Relations Committee rescinded on their promise to award a grant of £1000.<sup>44</sup> Instead they offered £500, with the possibility of another £500 to be given by the newly formed Arts Council, and a stipulation that no more than £1000 would be

39. Minutes PEN Papers, April 24, 1942.

40. Minutes PEN Papers, May 15, 1942.

41. For more on this, see Donal Ó Drisceoil, “‘The Best Banned in the Land’: Censorship and Irish Writing since 1950,” *Yearbook of English Studies* 35 (2005), 146–60.

42. The Cultural Relations Committee was set up in June 1946, the same month as International Congress in Stockholm. The organization had a small budget to grant aid cultural activities, one of which was a stipend toward the expenses of sending a delegation to Sweden. Within five years, the first Irish Arts Council was established. See Kennedy, *Dreams and Responsibilities*, 63. It is notable, too, that members of the Cultural Relations Committee included representatives from the Irish Tourist Association, Aer Lingus, Bord Fáilte, Irish Rail, and Córas Iompair Éireann, or CIÉ, all of which had vested interests in the development of tourism and were active patrons of the PEN Congress in 1952. See Eric G. E. Zuelow, *Making Ireland Irish: Tourism and National Identity Since the Irish Civil War* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 57–58.

43. Minutes PEN Papers, February 25, 1949.

44. Minutes PEN Papers, February 15, 1952.

forthcoming.<sup>45</sup> An indignant PEN committee threatened to withdraw from the event, and immediately drafted a letter to the government in protest. Within one month, the government sent a letter confirming grant monies.<sup>46</sup> It seems that official Ireland was more than happy to support the Congress and was willing to fund it. So, too, were the embassies and academic institutions, as well as civic-minded commercial enterprises. Sponsorship was awarded by commercial bodies, including Aer Lingus, and other business interests. A special PEN brochure sponsored by Irish Shell Limited was prepared for the occasion, and badges with the PEN emblem were issued for delegates.<sup>47</sup> This sort of relationship with Irish commercial enterprises was a new departure for literary organizations.

PEN's long-discussed plans to publish an anthology of poetry gathered pace. Irish members had first proposed an anthology of their work in October 1946, to raise funds to help finance the club.<sup>48</sup> The publishing contract went to the Talbot Press, then one of the leading publishing houses in Ireland, and one with links to PEN. Ronald Lyons, the son of the Talbot Press's founder W.G. Lyons, was an active member of PEN and one of two delegates assigned to attend Amsterdam Congress in 1954.<sup>49</sup> It was an ambitious publication, declaring its intention to be "to afford a glimpse of Irish poetic achievement in the present century." Forty-one "past or present members" from Dublin and Belfast PEN were invited to submit a poem. Conscious of the opportunity to present their work to a worldwide audience, poets who accepted the invitation included Austin Clarke, Blanaid Salkeld, Padraic Colum, Winifred Letts, Seumus O'Sullivan, Mary Davenport O'Neill, Joseph Campbell, Rhoda Coghill, and Stephen Gwynn. In April 1952, an octavo-sized book was produced, with a light brown dust jacket, set between cloth boards, and a circular frontispiece with three quills, individually marked with a letter to spell P.E.N., set over a rising sun.<sup>50</sup> The book was advertised in the national newspapers at a price of seven shillings and six pence. The emphasis was on the music of Ireland, with a quote from Moore's *Irish Melodies* setting the tone: "In every house was one or two harps, free to all travellers." At least four poems had the word "song" in the title.

Their contributions were not appreciated by the poet Valentin Iremonger, however. Writing in the *Irish Times*, Iremonger—who was himself a member of Dublin PEN—described the anthology as "a treasury of the worst verse *ever* put with all solemnity between boards."<sup>51</sup> Describing the book as "junk" and insult-

45. Minutes PEN Papers, February 29, 1952.

46. Minutes PEN Papers, March 28, 1952.

47. Minutes PEN Papers, March 20, 1953.

48. Minutes PEN Papers, October 22, 1946.

49. Minutes PEN Papers, February 24, 1954.

50. *Concord of Harp: An Irish PEN Anthology of Poetry* (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1952).

51. Valentin Iremonger, "Line upon Line," *Irish Times*, 24 May 1952, 8.

ing many of the contributions as mediocre, Iremonger insisted that the anthology was not representative of contemporary Irish poetry. Certainly, the idealized version of Ireland represented in many poems in the anthology was anachronistic and obviously chosen to appeal to an outside market. Nevertheless, the committee was outraged at the tone of Iremonger's criticism and immediately composed a letter to the editor of the *Irish Times*, protesting "unfair propaganda against the P.E.N. at a time when we are trying to raise funds."<sup>52</sup> Fierce literary exchanges between the club and Iremonger ensued, including a retort from Iremonger that he was protesting his right to free speech.<sup>53</sup> PEN could hardly complain about the oppression of free expression, if they were guilty of it within their own ranks. In the end, the club agreed to drop the matter.

Surprisingly, in the weeks preceding the Congress, the issue of censorship was abruptly shelved. Committee memos record the decision to suspend the protest of censorship deeming it "unsuitable in the circumstances," although a provision was made to discuss it, if the matter were raised by other PEN centers.<sup>54</sup> The extraordinary turn-around by the club was possibly fueled by the recognition of the importance of the Congress, not only for the PEN club but also for the promotion of Irish books and what Peadar O'Donnell called the "economic circulation" of a writers' work.<sup>55</sup> In an editorial in *The Bell* earlier that year, O'Donnell had lamented the exodus of Irish writers who turn to the "foreign market to make his living," and the fear that writers have in speaking their minds "lest they suffer in their jobs of before their neighbours."<sup>56</sup> The implications for writers—in terms of reputation, book sales, and even employment—were serious enough to suspend criticism of the government to a world audience. Instead, PEN focused on the benefits of building bridges between rival factions within the international writing community, joining with UNESCO in an effort to facilitate postwar relationships through cultural projects.<sup>57</sup> In November 1952, a PEN subcommittee adopted the term, "The Literature of Peoples whose Language restricts its wider recognition" with the expressed view to promote the literatures of smaller nations.<sup>58</sup> As the world media converged in the capital in June, the Dublin center joined forces with the newly autonomous Belfast PEN group for a five-day festival of literary debates, political resolutions, and social entertainment.

52. Minutes PEN Papers, June 4, 1952.

53. Minutes PEN Papers, June 13, 1952.

54. Minutes PEN Papers, April 24, 1953.

55. This term was used by Peadar O'Donnell, the editor of *The Bell* and a member of PEN. See Peadar O'Donnell, "And, Again, Publishing in Ireland," *The Bell* 18, 10 (1953), 581.

56. O'Donnell, "And, Again."

57. After 1949, International PEN had a special "consultative" status with UNESCO.

58. Minutes PEN Papers, November 28, 1952.

The Belfast PEN group had operated under the auspices of Dublin PEN until 1953, and good relations had prevailed between the two centers. It was no surprise that when the Irish center received the invitation to host the Congress, they joined with their Northern counterparts to organize events throughout the two cities, with four-day sessions in Dublin and a one-day session in Belfast under the chairmanship of Richard Hayward. Trips to Belfast were arranged with a special train laid on to transport delegates from Dublin and arrangements were made for literary sessions at Queen's University, receptions offered at Parliament Buildings, Stormont, and a dinner at the King's Hall, Balmoral.<sup>59</sup> Trinity College Dublin hosted a sherry reception for two hundred delegates; the Book Association hosted a luncheon for one hundred persons; and various embassies held receptions for visiting writers from their nations. The promotion of Irish culture included a special exhibition of Irish books and fashion, the latter industry then emerging as a presence in the American market. Such designers as Neillí Mulcahy, Irene Gilbert, and Sybil Connolly were successfully targeting the American market in the 1950s. As part of this effort to promote Irish industry, women delegates were offered a chance to attend a fashion show—a “mannequin parade”—to showcase the finest Irish material and champion Irish fashion on a worldwide scale.<sup>60</sup> The organizers arranged for a “radio train” complete with a radio studio and a compere playing records to bring delegates from Dublin to the tourist town of Killarney.<sup>61</sup> To many, socializing at the International Congress was as important as the business meetings, and the accounts of the event are filled with reports of visits to museums and cultural centers, banquets, and receptions.

Well-known international writers in attendance including Margaret Storm Jameson, Andre Maurois, Peter Ustinov, Stevie Smith, Neil Gunn, Berthold Brecht and Shizue Masugi. The conference was introduced by the French novelist Andre Chamson with other welcoming remarks contributions in Welsh, Yiddish, Japanese, and Irish. The social highlight was the reception in the Áras

59. “P.E.N. Congress for Dublin and Belfast,” *Irish Times*, 26 May 1953, 7.

60. “500 Coming for P.E.N. Congress,” *Irish Times*, 26 January 1953, 4. During the 1950s, such Irish designers such as Neillí Mulcahy (daughter of Richard Mulcahy, former commander-in-chief of the Irish army and the brother-in-law of Phyllis O’Kelly, the president’s wife) were actively showcasing their designs to a world market. It is likely that these “mannequins of tweed” were created by Neillí as she prepared all Phyllis’s wardrobe for all events, including her trip to the United States in 1959, and championed Irish tweed in her designs. I thank Neillí’s niece and god-daughter Siobán Mulcahy for providing this information to me.

61. The semi-state body (CIÉ) arranged a radio train from Dublin to Galway for delegates at the Congress. “P.E.N. to help with translation,” *Irish Times*, 15 June 1953, 4. These trains were introduced in Ireland during the 1950s and were equipped with radio stations, and compères who entertained passengers with commentaries on places, history, poetry, and songs.

an Uachtaráin, the official residence of the president of Ireland. The Irish government, keen to play a public role, extended four hundred invitations to visiting delegates, one of the largest events ever held in the Áras. Reports cited queues of one-hundred yards to greet President Sean T. O'Kelly and his wife, Phyllis, Taoiseach Eamon de Valera, opposition government ministers, and members of the diplomatic corps.<sup>62</sup> Guests were entertained in specially erected marquees to the music of the Army band and reported on by a receptive media.<sup>63</sup> Other receptions were held in St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, and by the Guinness brewery.

These congenial gatherings belie the hostilities between the PEN centers represented at the congress, which simmered beneath the surface. PEN leaders needed to thread a delicate diplomatic line as they sought to resolve the internal rifts that developed in the organization in the postwar years. The presence of delegates from both French and German centers, for example, gave rise to considerable tension, which was only resolved by the compromise of offering two separate receptions—one in the French embassy for French delegates, and one in the Shelbourne Hotel for the German delegates.<sup>64</sup> But the latter gathering, too, was fraught with tension, for as one report noted,

There is a delicate situation in the presence of delegates from both Eastern and Western Germany. Herr Eric Kastner, president of the PEN centre in Western Germany, is here with Mr. Bertolt Brecht, from the East German centre, but neither delegate recognizes the other, and relations are somewhat strained between the two delegations.<sup>65</sup>

The awkward situation was bridged by adopting a resolution to observe a minute's silence in salutation to "those who had given their lives to maintain the right to freedom." Furthermore, PEN issued a public statement that called on delegates to establish and maintain contact between centers, irrespective of regime or government opposition:

The Congress solemnly recalls to its members that spiritually in the cause of freedom depends on the free circulation of ideas, on their being freely questioned and discussed and reminds all members of P.E.N. centres that they are failing to re-

62. "President Greets P.E.N. Congress Delegates," *Irish Times*, 11 June 1953, 7.

63. *Ibid.*

64. The German reception was hosted by the German minister for delegates from the East and West German center, German writers aboard, and the minister for arts and telegraphs. P. J. Little, "German reception for P.E.N.," *Irish Independent*, 13 June 1953, 4.

65. As Andrea Orzoff notes, the German centers, East and West, were reconstituted in 1947, only to dissolve into two separate centers after 1951. Nevertheless, during the Cold War, all German centers (four centers—East, West, Austrian, and German Writers in Exile) remained involved with each other. See Andrea Orzoff, "Writing Across the Wall: The German PEN Clubs and East–West Dialogue, 1964–1968," *German History* 33, 2 (May, 2015), 232–54. See also Minutes PEN Papers, February 7, 1952, for details of the "Split between German Centres."

spect their oath if they tolerate in silence restrictions of any kind on the freedom of thought and expression in the countries they inhabit.<sup>66</sup>

The call to action produced results. When concerns were articulated about the imprisonment of the cultural leader Vittorio Ocampo in Argentine, the congress passed a resolution to send a telegram to Argentine President Juan Perón, in protest over Ocampo's arrest and imprisonment.<sup>67</sup> Characteristically, the concern for the welfare of writers was one of the main items on the agenda. As the congress came to an end, International PEN wound up its business meetings with a special message to Spanish writers in exile, and to Basque and Catalan writers, to express their solidarity and support for suppressed writers.<sup>68</sup>

As hosts, Irish PEN had a central role in bridge-building exercises and worked together with the UNESCO delegation under Roger Caillets to form a committee of eight members—four from countries speaking major languages and four from countries speaking lesser-used languages, “to advise on the translation of literary works of little-known languages.”<sup>69</sup> This represented a unique opportunity for the Irish center to become involved in a large international project and get worldwide recognition for their contribution to fostering peace and cooperation. It did not go unnoticed. The success of the Congress was lauded in the press in Europe, in Holland, Austria, and Belgium. At a committee meeting, later that month, the discussion centered on the “numerous congratulations” they had received, “including some from official circles here. Letters of thanks from the visitors to the President and Hon. Secretary are still coming in.”<sup>70</sup>

In hosting the International Congress 1953, PEN identified a crucial space for art and literature in nation-building exercises, and cultivated a prominent public role for the intellectual in the new nation, while at the same time adhering to the spirit of International PEN to speak out for liberty of expression. The Irish Center continued the relentless fight to support literature over the next decades, and lobbied publicly for better material conditions for Irish writer. Its campaign to celebrate excellence in literature, and to uphold human rights concerns, continues to resonate today.

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66. “P.E.N. protest to Peron,” *Irish Times*, 13 June 1953, 1.

67. Ocampo was released before this telegram was sent, but PEN sent it nonetheless, registering their satisfaction at her release. “P.E.N. protest to Peron,” *Irish Times*, 13 June 1953, 1.

68. “P.E.N. to help with translation,” *Irish Times*, 15 June 1953, 4.

69. “P.E.N. to help with translation,” 4.

70. Minutes PEN Papers, June 26, 1953.